

Redemption

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Summary: When it comes to a certain dragon, Hiccup will do whatever it takes.

Redemption

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****Redemption****

He stood over his master's forge, eyeing his work with shrewd consideration. Another three bursts from the bellows should do it. Moving slightly to one side, he grasped the leather-bound handle and pumped more air through the coals. The flames leapt violently, intense enough, it seemed, to consume anything they touched. The thin metal rod at the heart of the forge went from cherry red to bright orange in a few short seconds. Yes, that was the colour.

The boy grabbed the tongs, quickly transferring his workpiece to the anvil. A few deft hammer-strikes sent sparks flying to the floor, and then it was straight into the quenching tub. For some reason, the sharp hiss was always so satisfying.

Hiccup sighed. Gobber would rant at him for the amount of charcoal he was going through. That wasn't so bad, though... he could always work off what he owed. No, it was the secrecy, the duplicity, that he couldn't cope with. But he could see no other way. For all that he hated to deceive his friend the master smith, he was driven by a stronger imperative. He had caused a grievous wrong, and he would make it right.

At least, the boy thought, he had a few hours grace to work at the forge in private. He and Gobber had worked solidly since early morning. Bang on schedule then, as the dipping sun touched the trees fringing the village, the smith had detached the mallet from his stump, replacing it with his trusty tankard-attachment. Soon he would

be among his mates in the great hall, the liquor flowing freely. Hiccup was confident of being able to work uninterrupted for a little while yet.

In fact, so sure was he in his solitude, and so wrapped up in checking the dimensions for the tailfin's last strut, that he quite failed to notice the distinctive tap-and-thud on the path to the forge. Moments later, a very grumpy Gobber shouldered his way back into his domain.

"Damn mead's _off!_ A rat went and drowned in the flippin' _keg!_ What's a man to _do?_"

Gobber wrenched off his mug-hand and tossed it carelessly onto the workbench, scattering tools in all directions. Hiccup winced, teetering on the edge of panic. Clearly the gods hated him. The newly-finished rod lay in plain view, and Gobber was both irate and sober. It was the worst of all possible combinations.

"Ahhh... Hi Gobber, hi Gobber, hi Gobber..."

"You still here, Hiccup? You're allowed some down-time too, y'know." Gobber's tone moderated somewhat as he addressed his apprentice. Then his gaze fell on Hiccup's latest creation, still wet from the bucket. The kindly look in the smith's eye was gone in an instant as his anger flared anew.

"And just what the _heck_ is _this?_ Hiccup, you know our fuel's running low, and there's even less iron to be had after that incident last month with the Burglars! We need to be careful with materials!"

Hiccup improvised wildly.

"It's... it's... an experiment! You're always saying I need to improve my skills!"

Gobber knew an excuse when he heard one.

"This ain't no _experiment! This_..." he yelled, grabbing the rod and brandishing it furiously, "_This_... is... is..."

He calmed down for long enough to give the strut a cursory inspection. His expert eye quickly took in the precise dimensions, the fine finish, the socketed end.

"It's a... a... _component!_ You're at it again, ain't ya? You're makin' _another bloody machine!_"

Hiccup thought fast, but the situation had gotten away from him. He had never liked to lie, and now was not a good time to start practicing. In any case, he doubted if anyone could concoct an innocent explanation for the item currently held in Gobber's huge mitt. In another moment his secret would be out, and there was nothing he could do about it. He decided on one last desperate try. His voice came out as a high pitched yelp.

"You're right... you're right... it _is_ _a component. But it's an experiment too, and it's gonna help us in lots of ways... I just haven't thought of them all yet..." he finished lamely.

Gobber paused, regretting his harsh tones. He remembered his own youthful days in the forge, the first thrill of making metal bend to his will. Hiccup was a good apprentice; he had been wrong to douse his enthusiasm so harshly. Gobber glanced sidelong at the boy, and then gave the piece in his hand a more careful consideration.

"I can't deny it, Hiccup, but this is fine work. Good 'n' light... nice even thickness all along... strange brightness to it though. What colour did you use to harden it?"

Hiccup dared to take a deeper breath.

"Orange... but that's not the thing, that's not what'll help us..."

Gobber peered closer, seeing for the first time the minute wavy patterns that rippled down the entire length of the rod. His eyes grew wide, his voice falling to a whisper.

"You have the pattern-welding..."

Hiccup shrugged one shoulder modestly.

"It was those Celts on the trading mission last year. One of them talked me through it."

Slowly, with something strangely like reverence, Gobber offered the steel shaft back to his apprentice.

"Hiccup, I don't know what it's for, and I don't wanna know. But it's amazin' work. Show me once we've re-stocked with ingots, yeah? And in the meantime, for Odin's sake go easy with what we've got".

Shaking his head ruefully, the old forge master turned to leave the smithy. At the threshold he paused, throwing a quiet comment over his shoulder.

"We'll say nothin' of this to yer father, hmm?"

* * *

><p>I will wait for you.

* * *

><p>Fishlegs stared at the drawing, nonplussed.<p>

"Hiccup, do you have any idea how long it'll take me to make this?"

Hiccup affected innocence.

"Well, a good few hours, I suppose..."

"Oh yeah, and the rest. I'm getting pretty quick in the tannery now, you know that. But this... I'll be bathing for a whole month to get rid of the smell."

Hiccup knew. Asking his friend to do the work was already leaving a

bad taste in his mouth.

"'Legs, I'm sorry, really I am. I'll make it up to you, I promise. I just can't work the thin leather like you can. And it's_ really _important".

Fishlegs glanced at him conspiratorially.

"No chance of letting me know why, I suppose?"

Hiccup hung his head. He would dearly like to tell his friend, but it was too soon yet. In this fine leatherwork rested all his prospects of redemption, of salvation. His mind was made up: the dragon's life took precedence. Any other course would amount to the worst betrayal he could imagine.

But he swore that, given half a chance, he would make it up to Fishlegs. Five minutes up close and personal with a friendly Fury ought to do it...

"Ach, forget it. I'll get it done, no bother. Oh, I was going to ask... what sort of stitching do you want?"

Hiccup drew breath to answer, but his friend interrupted him.

"Hey..."

Fishlegs had turned the drawing on its side.

"Is this a _saddle_?"

* * *

><p>Hiccup came into the cove again, happily burdened with steel and leather. Toothless was at his side in an instant. The boy still couldn't overcome his amazement at the beauty of the black dragon's form, his sleek outline, the broad wings folded neater than any gull's, the aura of barely contained power. Oh, and the rate at which his best friend got through fish, of course.<p>

I trust you.

Hiccup felt the tension fall away from his body. It was palpable; his shoulders, rigid for too long, loosened; his muscles, so long held in semi-spasm, relaxed. A smile worked its way effortlessly onto his face, and his eyes grew as bright as those of his companion.

The boy did not care to dwell on his sense of deep contentment at these moments of reunion. So much in his life felt uncertain, amenable to change; but not this. Keeping company with the dragon had taught Hiccup to trust a little more in his own feelings. This moment felt right, and it was enough.

The dragon glanced behind him, flicking his tail. Of course; the tailfin first.

End
file.